

Dig site identifies complete prehistoric Greek pottery workshop

October 20 2014, by George Diepenbrock

A University of Kansas professor is part of a research team in eastern Crete that has identified the most complete existing record of a prehistoric Greek pottery workshop.

John Younger, professor of classics, has worked since 2011 on an archaeological excavation site known as Gournia that the team has determined was a pottery-manufacturing center dating 4,000 years ago.

"People have identified other areas where people might have been making pottery because they've found potter's wheels. But this is no maybe," Younger said. "We've got the entire process from quarrying the clay, bringing it to the workshop and storing it, to making it into pots and shipping the pots out. We've got the whole thing. We can document the entire process, and it's not theoretical. We've got the building. We've got the pots. We've got the tools."

Vance Watrous of the University at Buffalo, director of the [Gournia Excavation Project](#), asked Younger to serve as a trench supervisor for the area where Younger eventually discovered the pottery workshop. The main goal of the expedition is to find evidence for buildings that predate the main period of the site, which is about 1600 B.C. Younger's workshop dates about 200 years earlier.

"This project is significant because it attempts to learn more about everyday life in prehistoric Crete," Younger said. "Most past research has focused on palaces and the elites from that era, not everyday

people."

As he sought to learn more about the workshop, Younger began taking pottery-making classes at the Lawrence Arts Center from Kyla Strid, who is now the arts center's studio manager. The more he learned about the modern craft of pottery, the more Younger said he was able to determine what went on at the ancient pottery workshop in Crete thousands of years ago.

He even had Strid come to consult at the site with him last summer to help him figure out details like where potters would sit and where they would put their tools. Younger also experienced an epiphany as he visited KU's large kiln site on 15th Street in Lawrence and noticed how much area of the building is devoted to storing the wood that fires the kilns and the pots.

"The Gournia workshop I've been excavating is huge by prehistoric terms, and one of the puzzles that we'd had over the past couple of years is that right in front of the workshop they had shaved the bedrock down to where it was absolutely flat for about half the size of a football field," Younger said. "Until I started thinking about this, it really puzzled me. What are they doing? Well, they're stacking wood and drying the newly made pots."

Younger is currently working on publishing the workshop, the architecture and the objects found in it, like the potter's tools. His major research specialty is objects made of stone, like Greek sculpture and architecture, and how ancient artists worked.

"With crafts the techniques haven't really changed much over thousands of years. And my research on the pottery workshop has shown that that also appears to be true for the craft of pottery making as well. The only changes might be the material that your tools are made of and maybe the

power source, but your tools themselves aren't going to change," Younger said. "I've got several instances where I think I can demonstrate the same processes were taking place there as are taking place now."

Pottery made in Gournia was exported throughout the island.

"Now we know exactly where this pottery was being made," Younger said. "It's very exciting."

Provided by University of Kansas

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